

Our Views: Judge Right to Slap Down Plea Revocation Request

Posted: Tuesday, February 5, 2013 9:45 am | Updated: 9:46 am, Tue Feb 5, 2013.

Our Views: Judge Right to Slap Down Plea Revocation Request

By The Chronicle | 1 comment

The 25-year-old Centralian accused of raping and abusing his girlfriend's daughter to death last year appears to regret the only responsible thing he has done since Koralynn Fister's death.

James M. Reeder, in the 15-minute video we posted Friday on chronline.com, argued to a judge that he was misled by his attorney into agreeing to a plea deal last month. Reeder shows himself to be consistent, at least, as he claims his innocence and blames others for everything surrounding his case. He says he was taking anxiety and sleeping pills and was only vaguely aware of what happened in court the day he wept as he signed onto a so-called Alford plea. That type of plea allows Reeder not to formally admit guilt, although legally this is a guilty plea.

And that, Reeder said on Friday, is the reason he was crying on the day he signed the plea deal — not because of the girl who died under his watch, a girl whose poor little body showed signs of ongoing sexual abuse. She had partially healed wounds underneath fresh ones. No, Reeder said he shed tears in court when his foggy brain finally realized that this plea deal did involve taking at least a smidgen of responsibility.

That's a word that has not often come to mind since Reeder was arrested on the day he carried Koralynn Fister's already cold body to a neighbor's house, claiming she drowned in the tub while he went to get a towel. In disturbing police transcripts our reporter has reviewed from his interrogation that day, Reeder said, "I don't know where I went wrong with this town. You guys think I'm some kind of monster." In court on Friday, he continued to blame others, saying he has suffered harassment in jail because of The Chronicle's coverage of the case.

Judge James Lawler listened carefully to Reeder's whining complaints on Friday, then swiftly denied his request. When Lawler put Reeder on the spot, asking if he'd like a new public defender to represent him during sentencing, Reeder paused for a long time. Now that he had to take responsibility for his reckless claims that he was bullied into signing a deal, he was stunned and indecisive. Finally, he mumbled something that sounded like, "I guess he can continue to represent me."

While Reeder undoubtedly would have been found guilty if Friday's request had been upheld and the case had gone to trial, the event would have been like a poison pill in our community, contaminating the minds of jurors who confronted the gritty medical details of the acts committed against this little girl. Prosecutor Jonathan Meyer had already lined up psychological counselors to help the people who had to plunge into this filth so they could pronounce a verdict.

The only responsible thing Reeder has done since he entered the public eye is to agree to a plea deal that acknowledges the overwhelming evidence of his guilt to everyone but himself.